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MARCH 16, 2004

Alone at the Top

Louis Roederer's Supremacy Extends Beyond Cristal

If there is a Mason-Dixon line in Champagne, it separates the dozen or so largest *marques* from the hundreds of smaller houses.

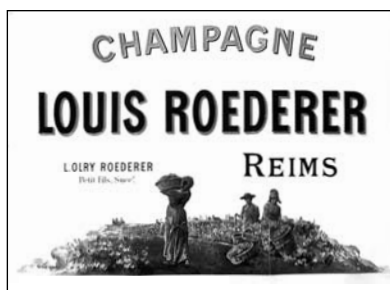
Market dominance goes to the big houses. However, they don't necessarily dominate in quality. True, *Grande marques* can make great wines when they want to—just look at the consistent splendor of Taittinger's Comtes de Champagne and Moët's Dom Perignon. But their lower-profile cuvées seldom receive the same care.

There is one exception: Louis Roederer. Roederer's winemaking standards rival those of smaller Bollinger—extending to its extensive use of wood. But the real secret to Roederer's quality is the grapes it uses. Alone among the *grande marques*, Roederer owns most of its own vineyards. And when it purchases grapes, it is famously demanding.

Emerging from the shadows

Yet, so overpowering is the glow of Roederer's prestige cuvée, Cristal, the quality of its other wines is known only to insiders. In part, this is because fully half of Roederer's production is Cristal and Cristal Rosé. The house makes far smaller quantities of its other wines, including its benchmark vintage Brut. As hard as it is to track down Cristal, finding Roederer Vintage can be even more of a challenge.

But it's worth the hunt. In naming Roederer one of Champagne's best five producers last year, Richard Juhlin praised the sophistication of its wines. This applies to Roederer Vintage as much as it does to



A century-old Roederer poster.

Cristal. It is a wine of great power and richness, with the structure for long aging in bottle. While the term "baby Cristal" captures its flamboyance, Roederer Vintage stands on its own as one of Champagne's greatest wines.

This Offer

Roederer has produced a stunning roster of vintage cuvées in recent years, but the real star is undoubtedly the 1996—no surprise considering how extraordinary this year is proving to be. Last fall, just as Roederer was about to move onto the 1997 vintage, we bought every case of the 1996 we could. Our timing could not have been better, since the dollar subsequently lost a good 10% of its value. We are pleased to offer this marvelous Champagne along with now-rare magnums of the 1990 and 1982 vintages—all at superb prices.

1996 Louis Roederer Brut
95 Richard Juhlin
\$54.95



Richard Juhlin: "Outstandingly good already ... The wine has a roundness and a full intensity ... Wonderful taste of chocolate, butterscotch and toffee apple."

1990 Louis Roederer Brut Magnum195.00

Richard Juhlin: "94 rating ... Wonderful balance and refinement. Creamy, nutty and classic, with a high degree of acidity."

1982 Louis Roederer Brut Magnum195.00

Richard Juhlin: "93 rating. The housestyle is clear as a bell with a polished and sophisticated character. Lovely toffee and with a great vanilla and rich fruit."

GERMANY

Legends-in-the-Making

J.J. Prüm's Historic 2001's from Wehlener Sonnenuhr

While Germany's fine 2002's are receiving well-deserved recognition, the magic of 2001 still looms large. *Wine Spectator* calls it the finest German vintage since 1971, and Pierre Rovani is no less enthusiastic: "A hundred years from now, 2001 will be remembered as one of Germany's vintages of the century."

No one had greater success in 2001 than the venerable Mosel estate of J.J. Prüm. This was the Prüms' 90th vintage—and it was among the most towering ever, yielding wines of breathtaking richness allied to a profound minerality.

And, as always, the greatest wines were made in the fabled Wehlener Sonnenuhr vineyard—Prüm's highest



Since 1911, the Prüm estate has been run from this Art Nouveau building opposite Wehlener Sonnenuhr.

site, with a precipitous slope almost entirely of slate. In most years, it produces—in the *Wine Spectator's* words—Prüm's "most seductively rich and filigree wines."

This Offer

Prüm's spectacular 2001 Wehlener Sonnenuhr's are well on their way to becoming legendary. Last year, in the height of the 2001 German campaign, we offered—and sold out—of both the Spätlese and Auslese and held out little hope of finding more. But a friend in Europe snagged a parcel for us at a great price. This could well be your last chance to purchase these wines at these attractive levels.

**2001 JJ Prüm Riesling
Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spätlese
96 Wine Spectator
\$49.95**

Wine Spectator: "A completely seductive and appealing '01 Spätlese. Seamless and airy in texture, yet layered with peach, citrus and mineral aromas and flavors enmeshed in the delicate frame. Lovely finish."

**2001 JJ Prüm Riesling
Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese
96 Wine Spectator
\$59.95**

Wine Spectator: "Piercing scent of slate, then the palate is awash in peach, pear and lime notes, intricately layered in the dense, yet clear texture. Beautifully defined by a firm, well-integrated structure, with an endless finish."

Prüm's Legendary 1988 Long Goldkapsel

Few German wines have ever created the stir in the marketplace that Prüm's 1988 Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese Long Goldkapsel did in 1989. Its hammer price that year at the VdP auction—which helps to establish the market for elite German wines—was perhaps unprecedented. The wine's fame has endured. Today, this is one of the legendary wines of the Mosel. These are pristine bottles recently released from the domaine.

**1988 JJ Prüm Riesling
Wehlener Sonnenuhr
Auslese Long Goldkapsel*
97 Wine Spectator
\$225.00 750 ml**



Wine Spectator: "Easily the best Mosel Auslese of this excellent vintage. Full-bodied, with very concentrated peach, apricot and honey aromas and flavors and a massive finish. Still quite sweet and far from reaching its peak. Excellent potential."

2001 Merus

A Superstar in a Great Vintage

At a time when the California cult inner circle is narrowing, and new memberships are *very* hard to come by, tiny Merus has, in just four vintages, secured its place among the elite.

Not only were its first three vintages (1998-2000) singled out as stars of their respective years by Robert Parker, Merus was the focus of a major 2001 article in the *New York Times Magazine* on California cult wines.

The *Times* could have featured any number of cult producers, both established and emerging. However, it chose to write almost exclusively about Merus and Harlan—exemplifying the level of dedication and sacrifice needed to achieve cult greatness.

2001 Merus

But while the early Meruses were fabulous wines with enormous promise, it remained to be seen what winemakers Mark Herold and Erika Gottl would create in a truly profound vintage. Merus was born, after all, in 1998—having missed the three greatest vintages of the 'nineties: 1991, 1994 and 1997.

That moment has arrived. The 2001 vintage surpasses 1997 in stature and rivals 1991 and 1994 among the great Cabernet years of recent history. And the 2001 Merus more than fulfills its promise. It captures all of the characteristics of the vintage: its incredible ripeness and intensity, its fabulous texture, and an ethereal balance that is improbable for a wine that is so powerful.

While Mark and Erika had to work to produce amazing wines in 1998, 1999 and 2000, it came naturally in 2001. A hot May and June reduced the berry size and increased the thickness of the skins, and from July until October the weather was perfec-



“What an inspirational story this small garage (literally) winery is ... The Merus offerings ... are among the most exciting new reds to come out of Northern California in the last several years.”

Robert Parker

“The finest year for Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot since 1994 and 1991 ... the balance is astonishing.” Robert Parker on 2001

tion, resulting in lavish flavors and ultra-ripe tannins. It was the kind of vintage about which winemakers dream.

This Offer

Since the beginning, Merus has been rare. Mark and Erika make the wine in the garage of their home in a quiet neighborhood of Napa. And their standards insure tiny production. (They are famous for the number of barrels they reject and send on to high-profile Napa Valley producers.) And though their production has increased slightly each year, it remains among the smallest among the “cult” producers.

But the real story is how many cases they put into commercial channels. Last year fewer than 70 cases—and almost no magnums—found their way to retailers and restaurants. This year’s allocations will be only slightly more. It is an honor for us to be able to offer this remarkable and sought-after wine. April arrival.

2001 Merus*

94-97 Parker

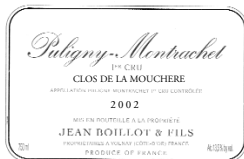
\$129.95 bt. \$350.00 mag.



Parker: “The blockbuster 2001 Cabernet Sauvignon ... tips the scales at a lofty 15.1% alcohol, but it is neither hot nor heavy. An inky/blue/purple color is followed by sumptuous aromas of espresso roast, melted licorice, fudge, creme de cassis, and blackberries. This low acid, full-bodied 2001 possesses tremendous intensity, a massive palate impression, and no trace of heaviness or heat from its high octane style. The tannin is sweet, but clearly noticeable. Give it 3-4 years of cellaring, and drink it over the following two decades. This is a thrilling offering from true garagists!”

WHITE BURGUNDY

A 2002 Superstar



**2002 Domaine Jean Boillot
Puligny Montrachet
Clos de la Mouchère*
93-96 Tanzer
\$75.00**

Tanzer: "Deeply pitched aromas of peach, clove and nut oil. Compellingly ripe and rich, with superb flavor intensity and the vintage's exhilarating combination of sweetness and vibrancy. Has brisk acidity, chewiness and precision ... Builds and builds on the finish, which features outstanding grip and energy."

CHATEAUNEUF DU PAPE

A Bargain Price on 2000 Ch. Rayas

Château Rayas, with its incomparable vineyard of old Grenache, is among the mythic estates of France. As made by the late Jacques Reynaud—and now his nephew Emmanuel Reynaud—Rayas is famed for its velvety texture and magically rich perfume. We are pleased to offer the superb 2000 Rayas at a spectacularly low price.

**2000 Ch. Rayas*
93 Parker 93 Wine Spectator
\$79.95**



Parker: "... kirsch liqueur, spice box, and licorice ... seductive, intoxicating ... no hard edges and a rich, fleshy mouthfeel."

Wine Spectator: "Remarkable ... has all the sweetness you can wish for from a young wine, with ripe tannins and some plum and cherry confit providing succulent flavors; you won't leave a drop in the glass. Smooth, silky, ripe, balanced, long finish. Drink now through 2015."

A Shiraz Hat Trick

Sought-After Wines from Down Under

We are pleased to offer three outstanding Aussie Shirazes from the 1990's, each of which is a compelling buy. The 1999 Dead Arm and 1994 Peter Lehmann are seductive for their prices. The 1998 Grange deserves your attention for a different reason: it promis-

es to be the finest Grange since the perfect 1971 and 1976. The historic quality of 1998 Grange has not been lost on Aussie collectors; the wine has been on fire in Australia for the past year, now selling virtually everywhere for \$400-\$500 a bottle.

**1999 D'Arenberg Shiraz
"The Dead Arm"*
96 Parker
\$59.95**

Parker: "Full bodied and awesomely rich, notes of black pepper, licorice, and blackberry as well as cherry liqueur cascade over the palate with enormous concentration and intensity ... a timeless museum piece ..."

**1998 Penfolds
Grange
99 Parker
\$279.95**

Parker: "... will be legendary... an extraordinarily intense nose ... It is a seamless effort with sweet tannin, well-integrated acidity, sensational extract, and layer upon layer of blackberry and cassis fruit ... an all-time classic."

**1994 Peter Lehmann
Shiraz "Stonewell"*
95 Parker
\$59.95**

Parker: "Boasts a sumptuous nose of black raspberries, cassis, toasty American oak, vanillin, spice, and pepper. This monster-sized, chewy, lavishly-endowed Shiraz is soft enough to be drunk now, but promises to age well for 10-20 years."

SAUTERNES

Climens

"If one measures the greatness of a wine by its extraordinary balance and finesse, Climens has no peers." Robert Parker

For Sauternes lovers, Climens has always embodied elegance. Ch. d'Yquem can be counted on to deliver otherworldly opulence in great years. But outstanding years of Climens are likely to produce a wine of ethereal refinement.



Ch. Climens in the 19th century

Not only does Climens have the commune's finest *terroir*—at the very top of the Barsac plateau—its unusual cèpage of 98% old-vine Semillon produces a wine of haunting grace. Also, its regime of 100% barrel fer-

mentation, and a further two years in cask, marries perfectly the fresh flavors of lemon and pineapple with the opulence of honey, vanilla and *crème brûlée*.

In two centuries of winemaking, Climens enjoyed no greater success than between 1986 and 1990, with an incredible four great vintages out of five. Of these, the two standouts are the now-rare 1986 and 1988, both earning lofty 96-point scores from Robert Parker.

1986 Ch. Climens* 96 Parker

\$110.00 *bt.* **\$65.00** *half bt.*



1988 Ch. Climens* 96 Parker

\$110.00 *bt.* **\$65.00** *half bt.*



Robert Parker: "... probably the best Climens made since their spectacular 1971 ... it has an expansive bouquet of new oak, oranges, pineapples, and other tropical fruits. In the mouth, there is great richness that seems all the more impressive because of the wine's remarkable clarity and definition ... a stunning example of Climens at its very best."

Robert Parker: "The 1988 reveals layer upon layer of honeyed pineapple- and orange-scented and -flavored fruit, vibrant acidity, high levels of botrytis, and a fabulously long, yet well-focused finish. It is a great wine."

1953 Climens from the Nicolas Cellar

The Parisian wine merchant Nicolas is famed for two things. One is the spectacular run of catalogues it produced between the late 1920's and the 1970's—each designed by a world renowned artist.

Its other claim to fame is its cellar. So perfect are the aging conditions that knowledgeable collectors pay a handsome premium for ex-Nicolas bottles—preferring them even to wines that come straight from producers' cellars.

In 2000, the organizers of the Hollywood Wine Society's Annual Great Wine Seminar in Miami asked us to find rare bottles for a Climens vertical tasting the next year. We came up with several; but

the real coup was four bottles of the famous 1953 Climens that had spent their lives in Nicolas' cellar. The wine was not only the star of the tasting; for us, it was a highlight of the entire weekend.

Since that tasting, we had not seen another bottle of ex-Nicolas '53 Climens offered for sale. But then last month our original supplier came up with a solid case. Of course, we jumped on it. Herewith is our offer of this rarity, along with the notes of Clive Coates, who moderated the Miami tasting.

1953 Ch. Climens *ex-Nicolas** 395.00

Clive Coates: "Intense, classy and flowery. 1986-ish in character. Very long, very lovely."

CALIFORNIA

Blackford Chardonnay

Exciting 2001 Chardonnays from David Cronin

Over the past three years, Blackford has established itself as an outstanding source of large-scaled, Burgundian-styled Chardonnays at fantastic prices.

Those who purchased Blackford's first two vintages—1999 and 2000—know what to expect: a “take no prisoners” style of Chardonnay—like that of Helen Turley in California and Coche-Dury and Niellon in Burgundy. Key features of David Cronin's winemaking are whole-cluster pressing, 100% barrel fermentation, barrique-aging *sur lie*, weekly lees stirring and unfiltered bottling.

But the first two vintages were only a prelude to Blackford's just-released 2001's. David took advantage of the vintage's key attributes (superb richness balanced by excellent acidity) to produce his finest set of wines yet. Again, production is very small: only 180 cases of the 2000 Armagh, and 480 cases of Sonoma Coast. Hurry.

2001 Blackford Chardonnay Armagh Vineyard \$39.95 *bt.* \$450.00 *cs.*



Armagh Vineyard is located in the hills to the west of Petaluma, where the micro-climate is cool and the soils clay-loam. Here, David draws on four acres of Dijon Clone 95. Even more than the previous vintages, the 2001 Armagh is a concentrated blockbuster, with a thick, rich texture, and leesy flavors of butter, hazelnuts, pears and honey.



2001 Blackford Chardonnay Sonoma Coast \$29.95 *bt.* \$350.00 *cs.*

This year, the Sonoma Coast is a blend of 75% River Vineyard (directly across the Russian River from Rochioli and Allen Vineyards) and 25% Ramona Valley, from southern Sonoma Valley. It has the Armagh's massive, mouthfilling texture, but with slightly more citrus and flowers than honey.

1997 Talenti Brunello Riserva

Last September, we praised the work of the late Pierluigi Talenti, winemaker at Montalcino's Il Poggione from 1958 until his death in 1999. Talenti was, in our view, the greatest Brunello winemaker of his generation.

A quarter-century ago, the Franceschi family, owners of Il Poggione, showed their gratitude to Talenti by giving him a superb Brunello vineyard named “Pian de Conti.” From 1981 until his death in 1999, Talenti annually produced a few hundred cases of classically styled “cult” Brunello from Pian de Conti. The 1997 Pian de Conti Riserva was Talenti's last great wine.

1997 Talenti “Pian de Conti” Brunello Riserva 94+ *Tanzer* \$65.00 *bottle* \$129.95 *magnum*



Steve Tanzer: “Saturated dark red. Complex nose combines strawberry, black raspberry, cedar, clove, minerals and piney underbrush; reminded me of Morey-Saint-Denis. Dense, thick and sweet, with almost porty flavors of black raspberry, strawberry and cedar supported by a backbone of steel. A huge, backward wine that opened slowly in the glass and should reward five or six years of additional bottle aging. One of the longest Brunellos of my recent tastings, with tannins in harmony with the wine's powerful fruit.”

Wines may be sold and delivered only to persons who are at least 21 years old. All wines are sold in California and title passes to the buyer in California. We make no representation to the legal rights of anyone to ship or import wines into any state outside of California. We are not responsible for typographical errors. All items and prices subject to availability. An * indicates pre-arrival. Issued 16 times yearly. Copyright 2004 The Rare Wine Co.

PIEDMONT

1997 Bruno Rocca Rabajà

Our quest for more 2000 Rocca Rabajà unearths a stash of the famous 1997 at an Amazing Price

We were taken aback by the response to last issue's offering of Bruno Rocca's 2000 Barbaresco Rabajà. With a 97-point *Wine Spectator* rating, and a below-market price, we knew that demand would be high, but we thought we had enough wine to meet it. Sadly, we didn't, and within two days we were forced to go back into the market in search of more.



Rabajà occupies the right flank in this photo, with Asili to its left.

No more could be found ... at least not at a similar price. But in the midst of our search we stumbled on something potentially even more interesting: a perfectly cellared parcel of Rocca's 1997 Rabajà at a stunningly low price.

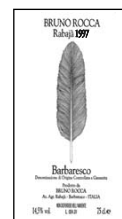
Bruno Rocca's Rabajà comes from the historic heart of this famous cru and is a quintessential expression of the site. The 1997 Rocca Rabajà not only scales the same heights as the 2000, it is very much in the same

style: disarmingly rich and concentrated with a room-filling bouquet. But you would expect nothing less, as it comes from Barbaresco's already-legendary 1997 vintage.

At this stage of its life, you would expect this wine to be selling at a substantial premium. However, our source needed to raise cash and offered us the parcel at an unbelievably low price.

This is a rare opportunity to acquire a *great* Barbaresco from one of the appellation's finest winemakers ... and at an incredibly low price. Don't pass it up.

**1997 Bruno Rocca
Barbaresco "Rabajà"***
\$59.95 *bt* \$695.00 *cs*.



Musings of a Wine Maverick *The Unpublished Writings of Roy Brady*

"I was sitting next to one of our more celebrated pundits when he was called upon to get up and comment on a rare old senility. He was eloquent about the 'twilight of its greatness,' and much other sham praise. Finally he sat down, pushed the glass away, and whispered 'Jesus, what crap!' 'The wine or your speech?' I enquired sweetly."

Roy Brady on Old Wine

Though few of today's wine collectors have ever heard of him, Roy Brady was one of the most engaging wine writers America has yet produced. He was an iconoclast, with a fantastic wit, who observed intimately California's emerging wine industry from the 1940's

until his death in 1998. He knew everyone of any historical importance and was arguably the most knowledgeable and experienced Madeira connoisseur of his era.

Now, five years after Roy's death, a collection of his unpublished writings has been gathered together in a beautifully produced book limited to 250 hand-numbered copies. This hardbound book is elegantly illustrated with tipped-in color facsimiles of rare wine labels from Roy's collection. The book is a total delight. All proceeds benefit the Wine Librarians Association.

**The Brady Book Selections from Roy Brady's
Unpublished Writings on Wine (2003; 199 pages) 100.00**

Saffredi's Tuscan Legacy

Classic Wines at Spectacular Prices

"The benchmark against which the newcomers will be measured."

Wine Spectator on Saffredi, Oct. '03

In 1990, on a visit to the UK, a friend served us an unknown 1987 Super Tuscan that knocked us out. A blend of Cabernet and Merlot, it came from an obscure corner of Tuscany: the Maremma, south of Bolgheri. The final shocker was that the enologist was Giacomo Tachis who, at that point, was known only for such "blue blood" Tuscans as Sassicaia, Solaia and Tignanello.

The wine was Saffredi, the first great Super Tuscan of the Maremma. Tachis made the wine until he retired from consulting in 1995. His replacement also had impressive credentials: Ricardo Cottarella. And then in 1999, Cottarella turned over the chores to Christian Le Sommer, who had steered Château Latour's resurgence from the mid-1980's on.

Evolving Greatness

Although Saffredi's style has evolved, reflecting the men who have made it, it has remained one of the singular red wines of Tuscany. And its quality has continued to climb as the vines have matured.

As the Maremma's lone truly great red wine, Saffredi occupies a niche similar to that of Montevetrano, which pioneered serious winemaking in the area near Naples.

Apart from the skill of its three winemakers, there have been two keys to Saffredi's enduring quality: the

Maremma's warm maritime climate and the low-yield viticulture that has been a policy since 1987. All factors combine to give Saffredi its remarkable opulence; sweet, creamy tannins, and great concentration.

It is a privilege to be able to offer the three greatest vintages of this extraordinary wine. What's more, the prices for the 2000 and 2001 are a fraction of the suggested retail price of \$95.

2001 Le Pupille Saffredi
94 Wine Spectator
\$54.95



Wine Spectator: "Exotic and seductive. Interesting aromas of very ripe plum fruit and hints of rosemary turn to flowers and spices. Full-bodied, with ultrafine tannins and a long orange peel and fruit aftertaste."



2000 Le Pupille Saffredi
94 IWC
\$59.95

Steve Tanzer's *International Wine Cellar*: "Utterly seductive aromas of blackberry, mint, eucalyptus and incense...with layers of dark berry fruit expressed with clarity and verve."

1997 Le Pupille Saffredi.....145.00
1997 Le Pupille Saffredi Magnum295.00

Robert Parker: "97 rating ... boasts a nose that is reminiscent of a hypothetical blend of Châteaux Mouton-Rothschild and Margaux."

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